Building capacity for chronic disease prevention in Community Health Services: Experiences of collaboration between research and practice

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Funded by the NSW Department of Health
Background – Main Study

- Pilot feasibility study to improve the capacity of community health services to address chronic disease risk factors as part of routine practice

- Collaboration between NSW Health, Centre Primary Health Care & Equity, UNSW and 2 pilot Area Health Services

- Action Research – how to embed brief interventions to change lifestyle risk factors (shown to be effective in efficacy trials) into routine practice in community health consultations
Presentation Outline

1) To outline the **process of collaboration** between researchers and primary health care providers in building capacity for community health services to build lifestyle risk factors into routine service delivery.

2) To identify the key **facilitators** and **challenges** of this collaborative approach.
Methods

Data Sources:
1) Reflective journal kept by Project Leader of key issues arising during the project
2) Consultation workshop with project stakeholders (transcribed verbatim)

Analysis:
- Coding of issues relevant to collaboration from data sources using NVivo 7
- Identification of key themes emerging from across data sources
- Themes feedback to project stakeholders for clarification / additions
Collaborative Processes

- Setting Foundation
  - 'Buy In'
- Needs Assessment
  - Planning/ diagnosing
- Implementation / Evaluation
  - Observe/ reflect
- Service Development
  - Action planning / Action taking
- Lessons for dissemination

Research Centre for Primary Health Care and Equity
UNSW
Research that makes a difference
Facilitators of Collaboration

Strong partnership between researchers & funders

Tangible benefits for all parties, congruence with core values

- Clinicians
- Community Health Services
- Researchers
- Policy Makers/ Funders

Clear roles and responsibilities

- Researchers – data collection /analysis, ‘content experts’
- AHS – service development ‘context experts’
- Funders – links with other initiatives
Facilitators of Collaboration

**Flexible and tailored approach**
- Ability to tailor capacity building approach to the needs of the service
- Flexible approach to consultation that fits in with routine activities

**Work with change agents / project champion**
- To drive changes in work processes
- Gatekeepers to working with teams/services

**Researchers as facilitators**
- Researchers provided tools/evidence to support service development
- Researcher understanding of community health & its context

**Consistent personnel throughout the project**
- Researchers and funders
Challenges of Collaboration

Obtaining ‘Buy In’ at all levels
- Extending commitment from managers (who originally agreed to participate) to clinicians.
- Getting clinicians and managers to appreciate the requirements of research

Continual changes to service/organisational context
- AHS re-structure, changes to key staff (project champions)
- Process for making changes to work processes under review
- AHS priorities under review, competing priorities

Research versus service development / policy timeframe
- Changes to work practices & systems in complex organisations takes time!
- Alignment of timeframes requires flexibility by all parties
Key Lessons

- A case study of collaboration between researchers, primary care providers and policy makers during challenging times
- Further data will be collected as part of the project evaluation

Key Lessons

- Action research provides a useful methodology for collaborative research in real life contexts
- Identify and work closely with internal project advocates or change agents
- Consider the research timeframe carefully when planning collaborative research involving changes in work practices
- Be flexible in your approach and set up processes for ongoing consultation at all levels
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